A Discourse concerning the Beauty of PROVIDENCE

In all the rugged passages of it.

Very seasonable to quiet and support the heart in these times of publick confusion.

By JOHN WILKINS. B.D.

PSAL. 25. 10.

All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, to such as keep his Covenant, and his Testimonies.

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THE PREFACE to the READER.

AMongſt all other *Doctrines*, this of *Providence* (though it do properly belong to *Naturall Theology*, yet) is of as Univerſal concernment, both for knowledge and practiſe, as any other

point, in *Christian Divinity*.

The very Heathen have acknowledged, not onely a *Universall* providence of God, which puts the *general* kinds of things into a regular way of working, But his *particular* providence likewise, which takes care of *Individuall* persons and actions. Why else do all religions oblige men to pray unto him, and to expect his speciall assistance, in every kind of want or necessitie?

But

But now, though this common principle be so universally acknowledged in the *Notion* of it, yet men are generally very negligent in the *practicall* application of it, to particular times and conditions; And so loose that comfort and satisfaction that may be reaped from it.

It is the chief aime and busineſſe of this Diſcourſe, to convince and quicken men unto this dutie, as being by ſo much the more

ſeaſonable for theſe times, by how much the preſent troubles and confuſions do now call upon us for it.

It cannot but occaſion ſome ſuggeſtions of Diffidence and Infidelitie, to conſider thoſe many ſtrange revolutions and changes in the world, which in outward appearance, ſeem ſo full of diſorder and wilde contingencies. And therfore it muſt needs be of ſpeciall conſequence for a man to have

have his heart eſtabliſhed in the knowledge and belief of this truth here inſiſted upon.

In all ages of the world men have been much ſtartled in their judgements, by that unequall diſpenſation which ſeems to be in theſe outward things. *That one event ſhould be to the righteous and the wicked.* Nay, *That a juſt man ſhould periſh in his righteouſneſſe, and the wicked ſhould proſper in his wickedneſſe. That on the ſide*

Pſal. 73. Ier. 12.

Eccleſ. 9. 2

Cap. 7. 15.

C. 8. 14.

C.4 v.1. *of the Oppreſſor there ſhould be might, and the Oppreſſed ſhould have none to comfort them.* This hath ſometimes ſo amazed and perplexed the thoughts of conſidering men, that whileſt they looked barely upon events, they could not tell how to extricate themſelves from theſe difficulties; which occaſioned that ſpeech of *Solomon*, C.7. v.7. *Surely oppreſſion makes a wiſe man mad:* that is, puts him to his wits end, tranſports him with

with wilde imaginations, whilſt he knows not readily what to anſwer in defence of ſuch proceedings.

But now, he that ſhal ſeriouſly conſider, how every thing is mannaged by an all-ſeeing Providence, which is exactly carefull, and infinitely wiſe, ſuch a man will be eaſily ſatisfied, that in all theſe obſcure adminiſtrations, (which ſeem unto us ſo full of caſuall, negligent, promiſcuous events) there is an admirable,

(though

(though unſearchable) contrivance.

As for the particular deſigne which Providence may ayme at in ſome diſpenſations, this doth not alwayes fall under our reach.

Prov. 25. 2 *It is the glorie of God to conceal a matter.* And many of his works are ſo ordered, that *though a man labour to ſeek them out, yet he ſhall not finde them.* Yea further,

Eccleſ. 8. 17. *Though a wiſe man think to know them, yet ſhall he not be able to find them.* And therfore,

fore, where we cannot understand his wayes, it is there our dutie, with an humble reverence to beleeve and admire the wisedome of them.

How would this, (if rightly considered and applyed) silence all those unseemly murmurings & complaints of men in these times. Remember, there is nothing befalls us but *what the counsell of God had before determined to be done.* And he can order things for the best, as

Act. 4. 28.

as well when they croſſe our deſires, as when they comply with them.

Eccleſ. 5.8. And therfore *when you ſee the violent perverting of judgement and juſtice in a Province, marvell not at the matter.* That is, Be not tranſported with wonder or impatience, or unbelief, as if the Providence of God were regardleſſe or negligent. For *he that is higher then the higheſt regardeth.* Though they that have the higheſt power

power amongſt men, may be ſo farre from *remedying*, that they rather *incourage* ſuch diſorders, yet God hath a ſtrict, watchfull eye upon them. And though men may be apt to ſecure themſelves in ſuch proceedings, by the greatnes of their own ſtrength, as if there were nothing above them, yet *there are higher then they.* And *there is a time, when God will judge both the righteous and the wicked.* C. 3. 17.

Let us be carefull of

of our own duty, to ſerve Providence in the uſuall means, and leave the diſpoſall of events to him. It ſhould be every mans chief buſineſſe, to *clear up the evidences* of his particular title and relation, unto *this great Governor of the world*, and this will be the ſureſt means to ſet us above the fear or hurt of all outward changes.

We ſee with what Artifice and complyance men will inſinuate themſelves, into the

the affection of thoſe who (according to ſeverall revolutions) are advaneed into the places of power. Of how much greater advantage would it be, to get an intereſt in his favour, who doth and ſhall alwayes rule over the ſons of men, having all times at his diſpoſal, out of whoſe hands no ſtrength or policy, ſhall ever be able to wreſt the ſway and dominion of things.

It cannot but afford ſtrong conſolation unto

to every true beleever to consider, that he who hath the chief influence, in all these great changes and variety of events in the world, is both *his God*, and *his Father*.

How did this quiet the heart of old *Eli*, 1 *Sam.* 3. 18. *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.* And *David* upon the same consideration professeth, *I was dumbe, and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it.* Psal. 39. 9. And our blessed Saviour himself makes use of

of this argument. *The cup that my Father hath given me, ſhall I not drink it?* Though the potion be bitter, and diſpleaſing, yet ſo long as it comes from a loving and carefull Father, we have no reaſon to fear any hurt by it. Ioh. 18. 11

And on the other ſide, much of mens unquietneſſe and dejection, is occaſioned, either by the want of this evidence, or by the neglect of applying it. When they terminate their thoughts upon

upon ſecondary inſtruments, *Fearing men that ſhall dye, and the ſonnes of men that ſhall be made as graſſe: Forgetting the Lord their maker, who ſtretched forth the heavens, & layed the foundations of the earth.* This is that which makes men to *feare continually, becauſe of the fury of the Oppreſſor.*

Iſa. 51. 12, 13.

How would it compoſe all theſe fears and diſtempers, if men would but labour after this aſſurance of their

their intereſt in God with the ſame zeal and intention of mind wherewith they proſecute their particular ingagements, and animoſities againſt one another. He that hath God for *his ſtrength and refuge*, is alwayes ſure to be on the ſtrongeſt ſide, & need not fear the moſt tempeſtuous mutations. *Though the earth be removed, and the mountains ſhould be carried into the midſt of the Sea: Though the waters thereof roar, and be trou-* Pſal. 46. 1, 2, 3.

troubled, and the mountains ſhake with the ſwelling thereof.

Thus much I thought fit to premiſe in the generall, concerning the neceſſitie, and ſeaſonableneſſe of this Subject.

As for the particular occaſion of publiſhing this Diſcourſe, I have nothing to ſay but this: That being ſollicited for a Copie of it, by divers perſons (and ſome of eminent quality) before whom it was occaſionally Preached, I knew not any

any more convenient way to ſatisfie their deſires, then by ſuch a publick communication of it.

I could ſpeak ſomething from *my own* experience concerning the efficacie of this Doctrine againſt thoſe damps and dejections of minde, unto which, ſuch times as theſe, will expoſe a man. It is my hearty prayer, that it may be uſefull to *others* alſo in this reſpect.

Farewe'l.

THE BEAUTY of PROVIDENCE.

Eccles. 3. 11.

He hath made everie thing beautifull in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, yet no man can finde out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.

THis *Book* contains *Solomons* experience in his search for contentment; which being not to be found a-

mongſt any of the creatures, he adviſes, never to trouble our ſelves in an eager proſecution after them, but to injoy our poſſeſſions with a chearfull liberall minde, without perplexing our ſelves in ſuch cares & labours, as may defraud us of thoſe honeſt comforts to be had by them. *For there is nothing better for a man then that he ſhould eat and drink, and make his ſoul injoy good in his labour.* ca. 2. v. 24. That's one of the *concluſions* which *Solomon* infers from his former diſcourſe, and which he further amplifies, and confirms in the following parts of his Sermon.

It

It being his chief ſcope in this book, to direct men how to behave themſelves with chearfulneſſe and contentment, under all thoſe great revolutions, and that variety of events, which may befall them in the world.

This *Chapter* contains a diſcourſe concerning Gods government and diſpoſall of times; and is therefore not unfitly ſtiled, the *Calendar* or *Ephemerides* of ſeaſons: whence the Wiſeman with divers argumentś urges upon us what he had before commended, a cheerfull and contented minde.

The text is one of these arguments : *God hath made every thing beautifull in his time*; that is, There is a wise order and contrivance in all the works of Providence ; Every particular event is most seasonable in that time which God appoints; And therefore we have no reason to repine at our condition, as if matters did not go well with us, for tis impossible they should have been better then they are, though they do crosse our private hopes and desires; yet God best understands the fittest order and season for all things, making them beautifull in his time. *Also*

Alſo he hath ſet the world in their heart: By *world* here is not meant this materiall world, but *ſeculum*, the ſucceſſion and courſe of things, as the original word עלם does properly import. This God hath ſet in, or * *expounded* unto mens harts, that is, he hath endowed us with an ability to diſcern in ſome meaſure that ſeaſonableneſs which he obſerves in the government of the world.

נתן בלבם

Yet there is no man can find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end: that is, it is above humane ability to comprehend the reaſon of all divine proceedings, we

cannot finde them fully out from the beginning to the end.

This very ſutable to the originall.

Others conceive that the words may be more properly rendred thus: *As long as the world ſhall laſt, God doth reveal unto mens hearts, the work which he makes, from the beginning to the end, excepting onely ſome things unto which man cannot attain.* As it he ſhould have ſaid, In all ages of the world, here are ſtill ſome paſſages of providence, wherin men may be able to diſcern a beauty and comlineſſe though there are ſome other particulars, which we cannot underſtand. The ſence of both Interpreta-

pretations, being for the ſubſtance, much alike.

That's the connexion and meaning of the whole verſe. The text according to its naturall fulneſſe doth compr ze in it theſe three particulars.

1. Every thing has its time.

2. Every thing in its time is beautifull.

3. That is the proper ſeaſon for all things which God appoints.

1. Every thing has its time. *To all things there is an appointed ſeaſon.* ver. 1. Not onely for ſuch *naturall* events, as beare in them a kind of neceſſity, as *a time to be born, and a*

time to dye: ver. 2. But also for those *voluntary* actions, that seem to be most alterable & contingent, *A time to weep, and a time to laugh*; ver. 4. The wisedome of Providence in the government of this lower world, hath disposed to every thing its particular season. This is that which we call, the *fulnesse* of time, the *ripenesse* of season. *Prov.* 27. 1. the wiseman saies there, that *the day brings forth events*, *Paritura est dies*, alluding to a teeming mother, to whom there is a set date for hir delivery. So doth Time travail with the decrees of Providence, and for each

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each ſeveral action, there is a pregnancy, a fulnes of time.

2. Every thing in its time is beautifull, even ſuch matters as in their own natures are not without ſome deformity. *A time to kill*, ver. 3. *A time to mourn*, ver. 4. *A time of hate, and a time of warre*, ver. 8. The ſcorching of Sommer, & the extreme cold of Winter, though both in themſelves alike diſtaſtfull, yet are comely in their ſeaſons, and thoſe times would not be ſo beautifull without them. Nor is it the naturall goodneſſe of any thing that can make it comely, out of its proper

ſeaſon. That which *Beauty* is in bodies, and *Harmony* in ſounds, that is *opportunity* in Time; Now as white and red, which are the uſuall materials of *beautie*, as thoſe particular notes of which *Muſick* doth conſiſt, may be ſo diſpoſed of, as to cauſe *deformitie* and *diſcord*. So actions which in themſelves are good, may be depraved by their unſeaſonablenes.

3. That is the proper ſeaſon for all things which God appoints. Or thus. Every particular event, is moſt beautifull in that time which the Providence of God hath allotted to it. Tis above the

the contrivance of humane policy to bring matters about in their fitteſt order. And therefore twere but folly to conclude that things do not fall out well, unleſſe they anſwer our deſires; for God beſt underſtands the fitteſt ſeaſon for every purpoſe. And whatſoever, or whenſoever he works, you may be ſure, tis both beautifull, and in its time; Even thoſe events, which do moſt thwart our private ends, (could all circumſtances be duly conſidered) we ſhould finde them to be performed, in their moſt comely order, and beſt opportunity.

As

As for the two firſt particulars, though they are implyed in the text, yet are they more expreſly handled in the former verſes. And therefore I ſhall paſſe them over, without any further inlargement, inſiſting onely upon this latter, as being more directly agreeable to the main ſcope of the words.

And tis a ſubject, that in many reſpects will deſerve your more eſpeciall attention; Tis not commonly treated of. And beſides, it may very much conduce to our contentment, to ſettle our hearts, againſt all thoſe condi-

conditions that may befall us in the world. Tis of very generall uſe and concernment, ſutable to all times and occaſions. For times of *ſuffering*, to make us patient and ſubmiſſive; For times of *mercy*, to make us cheerfull, and thankfull. In brief, it extends to all perſons, relations, buſineſſes, ſeaſons; nothing is more generally uſefull then this, to have our hearts fully perſwaded of that wiſe order and contrivance which there is, in the diſpoſall of every particular event in the world. And tis more eſpecially ſeaſonable for times of trouble and confuſion,

fusion, when men are apt to mistrust the government of Providence, as if he did neglect the care of this lower world, and leave all things to their own jarring principles. Then (I say) tis more especially seasonable, to vindicate the care and wisdome of Providence, to shew that every thing which God doth is best, and consequently, that these many distractions and confusions under which we suffer are farre better, then any other (though the most flourishing) condition could be. And that's the subject I am now to insist upon. The point is this.

Every

Every particular event is most beautifull in that time, which the providence of God hath allotted to it. Propos.

A truth, by so much the more seasonable for these times, by how much tis now the more difficult to beleeve it.

The Observation lyes plainly both in the scope of the place, and the most obvious sence of the words.

The Scripture is copious in other proofs to this purpose. *Deut.* 32. 4. *His work is perfect, and his wayes are judgement, a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right.* Not onely his first *work* of creation is exactly good and per- Confirmation by *Testimony Divine.*

perfect; but his *wayes* of Providence alſo are diſpoſed with judgement and righteouſneſſe.

So Ier. 32. 19. So again, *Iſa.* 28. 29. *The Lord of hoſts is wonderfull in counſell, and excellent in working.* That is, every event of Providence, is managed & pre-ordained by an admirable wiſdome, and therfore muſt needs be of *excellent* contrivance.

And again. *Dan.* 2. 20, 21. *Wiſdome and might are his, he changeth the times and the ſeaſons: he removeth Kings, and he ſetteth up Kings.* Iob 36. 5. Thoſe two attributes of ſtrength & wiſedome are for the moſt part put together in Scripture,

pture; God never ſhews any argument of his *ſtrength*, but his *wiſdome* is ingaged in it alſo. Thoſe great alterations & ſubverſions, which happen in the world, do not more demonſtrate the greatneſſe of his *power* in the doing of them, then the greatneſſe of his *wiſdom*, in diſpoſing of them for the beſt.

And again. *Pſal.* 104. 24. *O Lord how manifold are thy works, in wiſedome haſt thou made them all, the earth is full of thy riches.* Which is as well true of the works of *Providence*, as of the works of *creation*.

But this truth is more directly

directly intimated by that vision of *Ezekiel*, in the first Chapter of his Propheſie, wherein he doth expreſſe how all events in the world are wiſely diſpoſed of, by the care and government of Providence. The ſcope of that viſion was to confirm the faith of the Prophet in the certainty of thoſe things which he was to foretell; becauſe God himſelf by whom he was inſpired, had ſuch a ſpecial influence, in the orderly managing of all inferior events.

Though matters might ſeem *to run upon wheels* (as we ſay) to follow their own courſes, without any

any ſpeciall guidance, to go at random, yet *theſe wheels have eyes in them*, v. 18. that is, there is the eye of Providence which directs them in their revolutions. And then beſides, theſe wheels are likewiſe *governed by the foure living creatures*, that is, by the Angels of God, who are fitted for all their ſervices, with foure remarkable endowments

2 Chron. 6 9. Prov. 15. 3

Ver. 10.

1. With wiſdom and prudence, typified in that viſion, by the *face of a man*.

2. Courage and reſolution, *the face of a Lion*.

3. Sedulitie, and diligence, *the face of an ox*.

4. Swiftneſſe and diſpatch,

patch, *the face of an Eagle.*

In all which the Prophet doth at large explain unto us, with what deliberate care and forecaſt, the Providence of God doth diſpoſe of all theſe inferior events.

Humane teſtimony.

This truth may yet be further evidenced, from the very light of Nature, and the teſtimony of the Heathen. Hence was it that the Ancients did ſet forth their Gods with Harps in their hands, to ſhew the harmony they obſerved in the government of the world. And *Midas* was condemned to wear Aſſes ears, becauſe he preferred *Pans* Pipe before *Apollo's* Lute;

Bacons Sap. Vet.

humane

Humane policy, before Divine Providence.

Nay the devill himself doth acknowledge the wisdom and seasonablenesse of Divine proceedings, and therfore would fain have sheltred himself under this pretence, *Matth.*8.29. *Art thou come to torment us before our time?* Implying that it would not become the God of order to do any thing *untimely*. And doubtles that must needs be an evident and a great truth, which is confest by the mouth of so great a lyar.

For the further confirmation of this, let us a little consider, some of those

those rugged passages of Providence, which seem to be performed with the greatest negligence and deformity.

Examples. Look upon the History of *Joseph*, he was (you know) one of the promised Seed, concerning whom, God had foretold, a superiority and dominion, over the rest of his family. Now, that after this, he should be exposed to the treachery of his malicious brethren; That besides his nearnesse to slaughter from their hands, he should be sold into a far Countrey, whence there was no hopes ever to hear of him again; That there

there he ſhould be ſo endangered by the rage of a luſtfull woman, and ſuffer ſo tedious and unjuſt an impriſonment, all this might ſeem to be an over-ſight and neglect of Providence, as if it had forgotten that promotion which *Joſeph* was deſigned to. And yet do but reflect upon the latter part of the ſtory, and you ſhall find, how all theſe misfortunes did mightily conduce, not onely to his advancement, but alſo to the ſafety and preſervation of that whole family, which was then the viſible Church. So that if each of his brethren had given him as

much

much money as they ſold him for, it had not been ſo great a kindneſſe as he received from their intended crueltie.

It is an elegant gloſſe of St. *Gregory* upon this ſtory, *Divino judicio quod declinare conati ſunt, renitendo ſervierunt: Ideo venditus eſt à fratribus Joſeph, ne adoraretur, ſed ideo eſt adoratus quia venditus.* It was ſo ordered by Providence, that what they ſought to decline, they did promote, even by their ſtriving againſt it; *Joſeph* was therefore ſold by his brethren, that he might not be worſhiped, and yet he was therefore worſhipped becauſe he was

was ſold. *Sic divinum conſilium dum devitatur, impletur; ſic humana ſapientia dum reluctatur, comprehenditur.* Even ſo the divine counſell is accompliſhed in being oppoſed; ſo humane policy is defeated by the means of promoting it.

David.

Thus alſo is it in the hiſtory of *David*, he was (you know) deſigned to a Kingdom, but how many ſtraights was he put to before he attain'd it? being forced into the wilderneſſe like a wandring out-law, and followed there by a company of diſcontented perſons, who were as readie perhaps, upon every tri-

viall occaſion to revolt from him, as before from *Saul*. But above all the reſt, his laſt diſtreſſe was one of the moſt deſperate, when he was ſpoiled at *Ziglag*, not only of his goods, but his wives and children too, when his own Souldiers in their mutiny and diſcontent were ready to ſtone him; there being then but little hopes to ſave his life, much leſſe to get a Kingdom: And yet this diſtreſſe alſo, was in the event of it contrived to his advantage. For having afterwards purſued the *Amalekites*, he not only recovered his own, but got alſo ſuch abundance of

of other ſpoils from them, as ſerved him for rich preſents, whereby he might renew and confirm the friendſhip of his well-wiſhers in Iſrael, that after the death of *Saul* (which preſently followed) he might by their free votes be choſe to ſucceed him. 1 *Sam.* 30. and Chap. 31.

You may obſerve likewiſe ſomewhat to this purpoſe in the ſtory of *Jonah*, when he was ſent to *Nineveh* about ſo weighty a matter as the ſafety of that great populous City, and that too, when their deſtruction was within ken, but fourty dayes off, that he *Jonah.*

ſhould now make delayes and fly to *Tarſhiſh*, that upon ſuch a ſtraight, he ſhould run himſelf into hazards, might ſeem to argue ſome careleſneſſe, and neglect in the government of Providence. And yet this error of his was ſo wiſely managed in the event, that it proved a great advantage to the main end of his buſineſſe. For tis a probable opinion that theſe mariners, who caſt *Jonah* into the Sea, were a ſpeciall occaſion that his preaching was ſo ſucceſſefull afterwards. The *Ninivites* being by them informed, that this was that Prophet, for whom they had lately

lately ſuffered ſo violent a tempeſt, how the wind ceaſed, and all was calmed again, when they had once caſt him into the Sea; from whence it was not poſſible he ſhould be delivered but by a miracle. And therefore they concluded, that this muſt needs be ſome man extraordinarily inſpired from above, and that his preaching was not idle threats, but ſuch as might juſtly fright them into that rigorous Faſt which afterwards we read of, both for man and beaſt. It being the wiſedome of Providence ſo to contrive it, that this offence of *Jonah* ſhould

mightily advantage that end, which it did seem most directly to oppose.

Paul & Barnabas.

So likewise for that dissention betwixt *Paul* and *Barnabas*, *Act* 15. it might seem the unseasonable breach, that could possibly be imagined, when the Church of the Christians was now in its beginnings and infancy, that then the two chief members of it should fall at variance amongst themselves, was such an untimely dissention that an enemy could not wish them worse. Nothing could more thwart the promulgation of the Gospel of Peace, then the contentions of those that preach

preach it. If that State which is already eſtabliſhed into *a Kingdome, divided againſt it ſelf, cannot ſtand*, much leſſe could thoſe ſmall beginnings think to increaſe into a Church by diviſions. Matth. 12. 25.

And yet this likewiſe was ſo diſpoſed of in the event, that it did mightily conduce to the propagation of the Goſpel thorow the whole world; for by this means, thoſe two parted aſunder, the one into *Cyprus*, the other into *Syria and Cylicia*, and like two mighty ſtreams ſpread themſelves ſeveral wayes, that ſo they might the better water the barren and thirſtie Ver. 39, 40, 41.

corners of the world.

Thus have you ſeen the Beauty of Providence in ſome rugged paſſages of it. Tis ſo in every other particular, though ſeeming unto us never ſo deformed. But man cannot find out the work of God from the beginning to the end.

Confirmation by Reaſon.

For the further evidencing of this truth, there are two grounds upon which 'tis bottomed, that being rightly underſtood and conſidered, will make the point very clear.

1. God is exactly carefull of every thing.

2. He is infinitely wiſe for the diſpoſall of all to the beſt.

1. God

1. God doth overlook all things by an especiall Providence. *Ephes.* 1. 11. *He worketh all things after the counsell of his own will.* There is no event in the world but it is ordered both according to Gods *will*, and by his *counsell.* *Psal.*135.6. *Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he, both in heaven, and in earth, and in the Sea, and in all deep places.* Not onely in the *heaven*, where his glory is more especially conspicuous, but in *the earth* too, where matters seem to be full of confusion; And in *the Sea, and in all deep places*, where we cannot so much as take notice of them. There is no-

1 *Reason.*

thing ſo *great* but is under his *power*; nothing ſo *little* but is within his *care*. Thoſe actions and events that ſeem unto us moſt *free, caſuall, inconſiderable*, are all of them ordered by his providence.

1. That which is *moſt free*, the hearts and affections of men do follow the guidance of his decrees; men may do after their own counſels and inclinations, but they are ſtill ſutable to his Providence; there is nothing more in our command, then our thoughts and words, and yet both *the preparation of the heart, and the anſwer of the tongue is from the* Lord. Prov. 16. 1.

2. That

2. That which ſeems moſt *caſuall*, *The diſpoſing the Lot is from him.* Prov. 16.33. He who is accidentally ſlain by another is ſaid *to be delivered into his hands by God.* Exod. 21.13. That caſuall arrow ſhot at random was directed by Providence to fulfill the prediction of *Ahabs* death. 1 *Kin.* 22.34 There is no libertie for cauſes to operate in a looſe and ſtragling way, but in matters of greateſt uncertainty there is a pre-ordained courſe of effects.

3. *The leaſt moſt inconſiderable things*, are not neglected by Providence. It was a * prophane ſpeech

* Like that of the Poet:

Non vacat exiguis rebus adesse Jovi.

ſpeech of the Aramites, *That God was the God of the mountains, not of the valleys.* 1 *King.*20.23. whereas he regards *the lowest the leaſt* thing as well as the *greateſt*. The *young Lions*, Pſal. 104.21. The *Ravens*, Pſal. 147.9. are provided for by him. He feeds the *fowls of the air*, adorns the *lilly*, and clothes *the graſſe of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is caſt into the oven.* Sparrows (you know) are but cheap birds, *Are not two of them ſold for a farthing?* Matth. 10.29. *And yet not one of theſe doth fall to the ground without your Father.* He muſt give the Fowler leave to kill them; nay when

when they are upon the wing in their frequent and often repeated motions, yet then it is he that muſt appoint them the time and place when and where they ſhall ſettle; and in this ſence alſo, *not one of them doth fall to the ground without your Father.* The hairs of our head, are yet leſſe obſervable, contemptible even to a Proverb, *Pili non facio, Ne pilo quidem melius.* And yet theſe with God, are *inter numerata*, amongſt thoſe things whereof he takes an exact account.

That place, 1 *Cor.* 9. 9. *Doth God take care for oxen?* doth not ſimply exempt ſuch

ſuch things from the law of his Providence; but tis *Argumentum a minori*, and doth imply his more eſpeciall care of that higher rank of creatures to whom theſe are ſubordinate. The plain meaning of it is, That if God hath by a particular law provided that the Ox ſhould not be muzled, which treads out the corn, He will be much more carefull of the labourers in his Harveſt.

Tis recorded to the glory of ſome Ancient Generals, that they were able to call every common Souldier by his own name, and carefull to provide, not onely *pay* for

for their Captains, but *litter* alſo for the meaneſt beaſt that did ſerve the Camp. Now you know there is not any creature but is a ſouldier to the Lord of hoſts, he doth ſometimes muſter up an Army of lice & flies, and therefore tis but reaſon that his Providence ſhould take care for ſuch things alſo. Why ſhould it not be as great an argument of his power to preſerve and *order* theſe leſſer creatures, as it was at firſt to *make them?* The creation of a glorious Angel, did not coſt him more, then that of a deſpicable fly. Was it not he, that out of the ſame primi-

primitive nothing, put that difference, which there is amongſt ſeverall natures? And if the Painter in the ſame peece draw a ſilken & a woollen garment, why ſhould he value the one above the other, ſince it was the ſame art that did both make and diſtinguiſh them?

2 *Reaſ.* 2. As his Providence doth extend to al things; ſo likewiſe does *his wiſedome*. As he is exactly carefull, ſo is he infinitely wiſe; & therefore as able for the contrivance of every the leaſt particular thing, as he would be, if he had nothing but that to look after. If the Providence

vidence of God had but *one project* on foot, we could eaſily conceive how he might be able to drive that through all the windings and circumſtances of it, with care and wiſedom. Nay we would truſt any wiſe man with the managing of *a ſingle buſines*, when he had nothing elſe to diſtract his endeavours: But for all thoſe multitude of affairs amongſt men and Angels, nay for the very *circumſtances* and *manner* of all thoſe ſeverall actions and motions, which are performed in every moment of time through the whole world; we cannot conceive

ceive but that in such a tumult of businesse, the eye of Providence may be sometimes over-seen. But this arises from our mistake of the Divine nature, we measure God by our own *finite abilities*, whereas we should consider, that that which is *infinite* cannot be confined by time, or number, or place; but is as well able at all times, to look to all things, in all places, as if there were only one businesse to be cared for: You may see some imperfect resemblance of this amongst the Creatures. Do but consider the *Sun*, how that at the same time, without labour or con-

confuſion, is imployed in divers ſervices for all the creatures under heaven. The diſtinctions of ſeaſons, the growth of ſeverall plants, its various influence upon Minerals, the cheriſhing of living creatures, with ſundrie other ſuch variety of imployments, which we are not able ſo much as to take notice of. Or elſe, do but mark the nature of the *Soul*, which at the ſame time perhaps doth *contemplate* heaven, *direct* the body in its ſundrie motions, *diſtribute* the food in a wiſe proportion to the ſeverall parts, not neglecting ſo much as the leaſt hair about it, but

but supp'ying that with ſutable nouriſhment. And all this it does without wearineſſe or diſtraction. And if a creature can do thus, much more then the Creator, who gives to every thing its proper abilitie, and doth actuate all things, by a more immediate aſſiſtance then the Soul it ſelf. So that though we ſuppoſe *infinite occaſions*, (which notwithſtanding creatures are not capable of) yet the Providence and wiſedome of God is *infinite* alſo; and there is the ſame proportion of infinite to infinite, as of one to one.

Now put both theſe Rea-

Reaſons together, if the Providence of God be thus *exactly careſull* of every the leaſt particular: If he be thus *infinitely wiſe* for the diſpoſall of all to the beſt, no wonder then, though every event in the world be both beautiful, and in its time.

Vindication from doubts & objections

For the further clearing of this truth, there are two doubts or *queries* to be reſolved, that ſeem to oppoſe it.

1. What's the reaſon why this Beauty of Providence doth not appear to us, but that many things ſeem ſo full of diſorder and confuſion in the world?

2. How may this conſiſt

fiſt with the permiſſion of
ſinfull actions, which can
neither be beautifull nor
ſeaſonable?

I begin with the firſt,
to ſhew the reaſon why
in ſo many things we
cannot diſcern this beau-
tie of Providence. The
verſe of the text tels us,
That man cannot finde out
the work of God from the be-
ginning to the end: that is,
tis above humane capa-
city to comprehend the
reaſon of all divine pro-
ceedings, we cannot finde
them fully out, from the
beginning to the end.
And ſo *Job* 9.10. *He doth*
great things paſt finding out:
Lo, he goeth by me, and I ſee
him not: He paſſeth on alſo
but

but I perceive him not. And again, Chap. 23.8,9. *Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.* The meaning is, that where ever *Job* turned his eyes, there were ſtill ſome paſſages of Providence which he could not apprehend the meaning of. God hath reſerved this as a peculiar prerogative to himſelf. *It is not for us to know the times and the ſeaſons, which the Father hath put in his own power.* Act. 1.7.

There may be a two-

fold

fold reaſon of this.

1. The obſcuritie of the things themſelves. There are *treaſures of wiſedome*, Col. 2. 3. Not onely for their *precious∫neſſe*, but for their *privateneſſe* too. *Hidden wiſedome*, 2 Cor. 1. 7. *Secrets of wiſdom*, *And theſe are double to that which is* (as *Zophar* ſpeaks) *Job* 11. 6. that is, Thoſe concealed providences, wch we do not diſcern the reaſon of, are of much greater proportion then thoſe that appear. We read in that fore-cited place, *Ezek.* 1. 16. of *a wheel within a wheel*, ſignifying thoſe involutions and intricacies which there are in the wayes of Provi-

Providence. And the Pſalmiſt tels us that *His way is in the Sea, and his paths in the great waters; and his footſteps are not known.* Pſal. 77. 19.

As it is in the works of *Nature*, where there are many common things of excellent beauty, which for their *littleneſſe* do not fall under our ſence; they that have experimented the uſe of *Mieroſcopes*, can tell, how in the parts of the moſt minute creatures, there may be diſcerned ſuch gildings and embroderies, and ſuch curious varietie as another would ſcarſe believe. Why tis ſo in the works of *Providence*, there are

very many paſſages of frequent daily occurrence, whoſe excellent contrivance doth not fall under our ſence or obſervation.

2. Our own ignorance and ſhort ſightedneſſe, and that in a twofold reſpect.

1. We cannot ſee that *end and drift* which Providence aimes at in many particulars; and therefore, no wonder though they ſeem unto us rude and uncomely. We meaſure things by this falſe ballance of *opinion*, which weighs onely their *outſides*, and doth not look upon their *ends* and *relations*. Now the beauty of things

things doth consist much in their tendency and reference to their proper ends. If an ignorant man that knows not the reason of a Winde-mill or Water-mill, should look upon them onely as places of *habitation*, he cannot think them well scituated, where they are so much exposed to the violence of winds & waves: whereas he that understands how the wisdome of the Artificer hath contrived those motions unto *usefull ends*, must needs confesse a beauty and comelinesse in the work. Tis so likewise in the events of Providence, which none can rightly

apprehend, but he that underſtands the ſpeciall drift and purpoſes which they are deſigned to.

2. We cannot ſee *the whole frame of things*, how ſundry particular events in a mutuall relation do concur to make up the beauty of the whole. He that can diſcern onely two or three wheels in a Clock, how they move one againſt another, would preſently think, that there were *contrariety* and *confuſion* in the work. Whereas he that beholds *the whole frame*, and diſcerns how all thoſe divers motions do joyntly conduce to the ſame end, cannot chooſe but acknowledge

knowledge a wiſe order in the contrivance of it. So likewiſe is it in the *frame of times*, where he alone is fit to judge of particulars, who underſtands how they refer to *the generall*. But now *we are but of yeſterday and know nothing, becauſe our dayes upon earth are as a ſhadow* (ſaith *Bildad*) *Job* 8. 9. We look upon things according to a *ſhort ſucceſſion*, and ſo are not able to diſcern that beautie which there is in their references to other matters *afarre off*. But now *to God a thouſand yeers are but as one day*. He beholds all things whether paſt or to come in the ſame *inſtant*. There

Pſal. 90. 4. 2 Pet. 3. 8.

is no *succeſſion* in eternity, but all things within the reach of time are *preſent* unto that. Though in the revolution of a wheel, there be a mutuall ſucceſſion betwixt the parts contained *in it*; yet an eye that is placed *without* can at the ſame time diſcern the whole motion. Thus alſo is it in the revolution of time, where though there be a mutuall ſucceſſion, betwixt thoſe things that are contained *under time*, yet God who is *without* and *above it*, doth at the ſame view behold all together. So that 'tis no wonder, though many things ſeeme beautifull to him, which

which to us who are ſo ſhort-ſighted may appear harſh and deformed.

2. The 2d. *Quærie* was this. If there be ſuch an over-ruling Providence, which doth diſpoſe of all to the beſt; how comes it to paſſe that there are ſo many ſinfull actions in the world?

To this I anſwer two things.

1. *When men thwart Gods will of Precept, they ſerve his will of Providence.* Thoſe particular interits of gain, honour, pleaſure, revenge, which ſway mens deſires and actions, are wiſely contrived to the promoting of Gods decrees and glory. When

Auguſtus made the generall tax upon the world, His end was to inrich himſelf, and fill his coffers But God uſed it as a means to fulfill the propheſie of Chriſts birth at *Bethlehem*. *Rehoboam*, and *Jehu*, and *Cyrus*, had all their ſeverall aymes, in thoſe works, wherin they were ſubſervient to Providence And they did itil accompliſh his counſell in proſecuting their own deſignes.

2. *That which in reſpect of mans execution is wicked and diſorderly, in reſpect of Gods appointment is beautiful and comely.* Therecould not be any more horrid act, then the Betraying and

and crucifying of our bleſſed Saviour; and yet even in this, as it was *decreed by the determinate counſell and fore-knowledge of God*: Act. 2. 23. there was the greateſt miracle of divine wiſedome that ever was extended to the creature. Such depths of policy, which all the ſubtiltie of men or Angels, was not able to *contrive*, no nor to *ſuſpect*, πολυποίκιλος σοφία, as the Apoſtle cals it, *Epheſ.* 3. 10. *Interchangeable wiſedom*, of *curious variety*, as the word ſignifies. Now if God could thus mannage the *worſt* action of man to the *beſt* advantage of man, well then may we conclude, that

every event of providence is beautifull in its time.

Application.

I have now done with the *Explication* and *Confirmation* of the text. In the *Application*, it may be usefull for these lessons.

1 Use. For Information.

1. For *Information*, and that in a twofold respect.

1. It may teach us our duty to take notice of, and observe the works of Providence.

2. It may direct us what to judge of the affairs of these times, under which we are fallen.

1. If all the events of Providence, be so wisely contrived, tis certainly then our duty to consider and to take notice of them. *Psal.* 111. 2. *The works*

works of the Lord are great, ſought out of all them that have pleaſure therein. And again, *v.* 4. *He hath ſo done his marvellous works that they ought to be had in remembrance.* Now a man cannot be ſaid to *ſeek out* or to *remember* that which he doth not carefully obſerve. Tis the chief ſcope of that *Pſalm* to excite men unto this duty. And *David* makes it a note of pietie for men to delight themſelves in the contemplation of Gods works, to *remember him in his wayes*, as the Prophet *Iſaiah* ſpeaks. This, *Aſaph* found by experience to be a ſpeciall Antidote againſt all diffidence and carnall

Iſa 64.5.

V. 7, 8, 9. carnall fears. In the 77. *Psalm* when he was surprized with those sad thoughts, *Will the Lord cast us off for ever, and will he be no more intreated? Hath God forgotten to be gracious?* &c. he presently applyes himself to this remedie, *v.* 11, 12. *I will remember the works of the Lord, surely I will remember thy wonders of old: I will meditate also of thy works, and talk of thy doings.*

If a man were but well read in the story and various passages of his life, he might be able to make an experimentall divinitie of his own. He that is observant of Gods *former* dealings and dispensations

ons

ons towards him, may be thence furniſhed with a rich treaſury of experience againſt all *future* conditions.

There are very many duties that depend upon a right underſtanding of the times. A man knows not how to order his ſervices of *prayer* and *praiſes*, without ſome obſervation and skill in theſe. It was a great commendation which was given to the men of *Iſſachar*, that *they had underſtanding in the times to know what Iſrael ought to do.* 1 Chron. 12. 32. And the ignorance of theſe, the wiſe man complains of, as being a very great evil: *Eccleſ.* 9. 12. *For*

man

man knoweth not his time, but as fiſhes are taken in an evill net, and as birds are caught in the ſnare, ſo are the ſons of men ſnared in an evil time when it fals ſuddenly upon them.

Now this obſervance of Gods works and diſpenſations, is a duty alwayes ſeaſonable, but more eſpecially in ſuch times as theſe. Tis commonly obſerved, that though ſmooth and peaceable times are beſt for the *liver*, the man that lives in them; yet times that are full of change and viciſſitude are beſt for the *writer*, the Hiſtorian that writes of them; ſo though quiet ſeaſons may beſt ſute

ſute with our deſires and outward condition, yet theſe diſturbed confuſed times, may be beſt improved by obſervation, and do moſt ſet forth the wiſdom of Providence.

The *common* providence of God in the various ſeaſons and order of nature, may afford excellent matter for contemplation, much more that *ſpeciall* providence of his in the guidance of humane affairs, which have been alwayes mannaged with various wiſdom.

But eſpecially in his diſpenſations towards theſe later ages, wherein there have been many new, unuſuall emergencies,

cies, ſuch as our fore-fathers have not known.

How many ſtrange obſervable paſſages, may a conſidering man pick out, amongſt the affairs of theſe few laſt yeers? How ſtrangely hath the whole courſe of things both in Church & State, been turned about, beyond all mens imaginations! How hath God in every reſpect, and on all ſides, puſled the wiſdom of the wiſe, and enfeebled the ſtrength of the mightie, abating the glory of all humane power, lifting himſelf up above others, in thoſe things wherein they dealt moſt proudly, effecting great matters,

matters, by deſpiſed means; what ſtrange ebbs and flowes of hope have we known? When men have been moſt full of confidence, then ſome unexpected accident hath intervened, and diſappointed all. So that the wiſeſt men have been often put to ſtand at a gaze, not knowing what to judge of the iſſue of things; And (though we have not had leiſure to obſerve it, yet) there has been ſomething equivalent to this, in other Nations: The whole Chriſtian world being generally full of ſtrange commotions. Now we may certainly conclude, that all theſe

theſe unuſuall turns and changes of things are not for nothing. There is ſome great deſigne to be accompliſhed by them. Tis our duty with *diligence* to obſerve the paſſages, and with *patience* to attend the iſſue.

2. This may direct us what to judge of the preſent times under which we are fallen. If it be ſo that every particular event is ſo exactly regular and beautifull; hence then we may infer, how all that confuſion and diſorder, which ſeems to be in the affairs of theſe times, is not ſo much in the things themſelves, as in our miſtake of them.

The

The *Roughest Seasons*, (though they may be unsutable to our desires) yet have in them a proper comelinesse, as well as times of the *greatest serenity*.

True indeed, the Scripture doth sometimes mention *evill dayes*; but this is not so to be understood as if time in it self could be evil, either *Naturally*, for so God pronounced it good; or *Morally*, because tis not subjected to any morall rule: but onely *accidentally* in respect of our mistake and abuse of it: when either we judge of it according to our own *wishes*, or mispend it according to our own

Ephes. 5. 16.

2 Tim 3. 1,5.

own *lusts*. Tis onely unwise, unholy men, that make unhappy times.

As in the *works of Creation* nothing is properly deformed, but every thing hath a peculiar beauty, according to tha rank and station wherein tis placed; Though in vulgar speech we use to call a toad and a serpent ugly, yet that is onely in reference to common esteeme; Wheras in respect of the universe they are as regular and comely parts as any of the rest; their outward shapes being sutable to their inward forms, and those purposes for which they were intended. So is it like-

likewiſe in *the wayes of Providence*, thoſe deſignes that in reſpect of our apprehenſions are carried on by a crypticall involved method, are yet in themſelves of as excellent contrivance, as any of thoſe, that ſeem to be of more facile and perſpicuous order.

If a man in theſe times ſhall with his reaſon conſult onely the outward face of things, they muſt needs ſeem full of irregularities & diſorders; when the ſpirits of men in the proſecution of the ſame ends, and the pretence of *publick welfare* ſhall be imbittered againſt one another, even to *publick ruine*, when

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when there is *a violent perverting of judgement and justice* in a Nation; and *on the side of the oppressor there is might, but the oppressed have none to comfort them.*

Eccles. 5. 8

Cap. 4. 1.

When there is a totall subversion of those degrees, in which the order and harmony of things doth consist, *Servants being on horses, and Princes walking as servants on the earth.*

Eccles. 10. 7.

When the mountains are removed, and the pillars of the earth tremble. When Religion and Laws (which are the *foundations* of a people) *are out of course.*

Iob 9 5, 6.

Psal. 11. 3.

And yet even in all this, there may be a designe of Providence for our good. This is certain, all Gods promises

promiſes to his Church are infallibly true, and all his diſpenſations (though never ſo croſſe in outward appearance) have a tendency towards the fulfilling of thoſe promiſes. And why ſhould not a man reſt himſelf in this beleif?

In our naturall enquiries after the *efficient* cauſe of things, when our reaſon is at a ſtand, we are fain ſometimes to ſit down, and ſatisfie our ſelves, in the notion of *occult qualities*; And therefore much more ſhould we be content to be ignorant in the *finall* cauſe of things, which lye more deep & obſcure then the other. Let

Let no man then presume to censure the severall vicissitudes & changes of things, as if they were unseasonable and ill contrived. Remember we are but short-sighted, and cannot discern the various, references, and dependancies, amongst the great affairs in the world, and therefore may be easily mistaken in our opinion of them. We do in this world (for the most part) see onely the *dark side* of Providence. At the last & great day of *manifestation*, when the whole plot of divine love shall be layed open, then we shall be able to discern the beauty of Providence in

in al the rugged passages of it, how *tribulation, & distresse, persecution, famine, nakednesse, perill, and the sword, do all work for the best to those that love God.* Rom.8. 28,35.

Judge nothing therefore before its time: 1 Cor. 4.5. Consider, *We cannot see the works of God from the beginning to the end.* And you know there is a vast difference betwixt the *beginning* and the *end* of a building. It may be our lots perhaps in these times, to see onely the *beginning* of the fabrick, when the old frame is demolished, the rubbish lyes scattered about, the new materials bring gathered into heaps. Posterity perhaps

may see the *end* of it, when all these confused preparations shall be made up into a beautifull structure.

2 *Use.* For Reproof.

2. This may serve for *reproof* of two sorts of persons.

1. Those that do not observe or regard the works of the Lord.

2. Those that murmur and repine at them.

1. This may reprove those that do not observe or regard the works of the Lord. Tis a great argument of Infidelity and irreligion, when men let many remarkable providences passe by them without notice or observation. Or when they look

look upon them onely in a ſlight and ſuperficiall manner, like thoſe whom the Prophet *Iſaiah* complains of, *Seeing many things, but obſerving not.* Iſa.42.20.

This ſin of inadvertencie of Gods various Providences, hath been oftentimes ſeverely *threatned* and *puniſhed* in Scripture. *Iſa.5.12. Becauſe they regard not the work of the Lord, nor conſider the operation of his hands, therefore is my people gone into captivity.* And again, *Jer.12.11. The whole Land is made deſolate, becauſe no man layeth it to heart.*

The heavieſt judgements that can befall a Nation, are *Captivity* and

Deſolation. And yet they are both denounced againſt this ſtupiditie and careleſneſſe of ſpirit. And you may gueſſe at the heinouſneſſe of the ſin, by the greatneſſe of the puniſhment.

Tis a ſin, that is after a more eſpeciall manner appropriated to wicked men. *Pſal.* 10.4,5. *The wicked through the pride of his countenance will not ſeek after God; God is not in all his thoughts. Thy judgements are farre above out of his ſight.* Things that he never enquires after or regards, as if he were not at all concerned in them. *Quæ ſupra nos nihil ad nos.* He looks no further then ſecond

cond cauſes, unto which he aſcribes the ſucceſſe or miſcarriage of events; and doth not take notice of that divine Providence by whoſe influence they are guided. You ſee, this is made the note of wicked men. And therefore, as we would avoid that *cenſure*, ſo wil it concern us to avoid the *ſigne*.

2. This may ſerve for the reproof of thoſe, that murmure and repine at the works of Providence, that take upon them the magiſteriall judgement of events; as if they could tell, how to frame things much better, and to contrive the iſſue of things to greater advantage.

How ordinary is it, for men to diſcourſe thus, concerning the great changes of theſe times? As if the unſearchable wayes of God, were to be judged before the tribunall of humane reaſon; *Who art thou O man that diſputeſt with God?* (ſaith the Apoſtle) how deſpicable in compariſon to his infinite majeſtie and wiſedome. If there be a commonwealth amongſt Ants and Bees (as ſome Naturaliſts ſay there is) 'twould make a man ſmile to think, that they ſhould take upon them the cenſure of State matters amongſt us men; and yet here the diſproportion

tion is finite, whereas betwixt God and man tis infinite. *As the heavens are higher then the earth, so are my thoughts higher then your thoughts; and my wayes then your wayes.* Isa 55.8,9

He that will take upon him to mend the contrivance of things, let him remember (saies one of the *Stoicks*) that the first thing he is to do, is *to mend God*, to teach him wisdom and care. And if he shall think himself unfit for that, let him not presume upon this. For consider, is not the Providence of God *exactly carefull* of every thing? Is not he *infinitely wise* to dispose of all to the best? Epictetus

Are not all things *ſubſeruient* to his will? Why certainly then, (however matters may appear to us) yet nothing could have been better then it is. Every thing ſhall prove for the beſt in reſpect of *his glory*, and (if we belong to him) in reſpect of *our good* too.

Tis an obſervable check which *Solomon* gives to ſuch preſumptuous perſons as are apt to repine at, and cenſure the courſe of things. *Eccleſ.* 7. 10. *Say not thou, what is the cauſe why the former dayes were better then theſe? for thou doeſt not enquire wiſely concerning this.* It ſhould ſeem, that thoſe

flouriſh-

flouriſhing dayes of *Solomon*, ſo very eminent for all kinde of plenty and peace (*Silver being in Jeruſalem as ſtones; & Cedars, as the Sycamores in the vale for abundance*) were not yet without ſome moroſe repining ſpirits, who were ſtill maligning the preſent condition of things; And therefore no wonder, if we finde the like humor amongſt men in other times. 1 King. 10. 27.

This the wiſeman doth here reprove, both by a *prohibition* and a *reaſon*.

1. A prohibition. *Say not thou, What is the cauſe why the former dayes were better then theſe?* that is, be not tranſported with

that common humor, of cenſuring and condemning the preſent ſtate of times, and commending the times paſt; As if the courſe of events were not managed by the ſame wiſe Providence now, which governed the world before. He doth not forbid men to enquire after the cauſe of publick ſufferings; For this is frequently elſewhere injoyned in Scripture, that upon the occaſion of any ſpecial judgement, we ſhould ſearch and try our hearts, conſider our wayes, and our doings, labouring to find out the cauſe of Gods diſpleaſure, that we may accor-

accordingly meet him in his wayes. But the meaning is, that we ſhould not take upon us the peremptory cenſure of times and diſpenſations, preſuming to condemne thoſe things, which we cannot underſtand.

2. The Reaſon. *For thou doſt not enquire wiſely concerning this thing.* Thats a figurative expreſſion ſtiled a *Meioſis*, when a phraſe ſignifies much more then the naked words do import. The meaning is, tis extreame folly for men to take upon them the cenſure of times and providences, as if they were competent judges of ſuch matters. There

There are two places of Scripture, that will make up a Sillogiſme to prove this concluſion.

He that judgeth of a matter before he hath inquired into, and underſtands it, It is folly and ſhame unto him: Prov. 18. 13. But now, *It doth not belong unto us to know the times and the ſeaſons which the Father hath kept in his own power.* Act. 1. 7. And therfore it muſt needs be folly to take upon us the magiſteriall cenſure of ſuch things.

Matt. 6. 34

Every day hath its proper *evill*, as well the former as theſe; and every day hath its proper *advantage*, as well theſe as the former. The verie dregs

dregs of time, if we endeavour to make a right use of them, may be redeemed into opportunitie. Ephes. 5. 16.

There are two reasons of mens offending in this kinde.

1. When they look onely upon some *particulars*, without the consideration of their *proper ends*, or *general frame*; Now tis true indeed that some particular events, *singly* looked upon, may seem very prejudiciall; but the whole *contexture* of affairs in their *cooperation* shall prove for the best. All things shall *work together*, συνεργεῖ for good to those that love God. Ro. 8. 28. But

But now tis above our capacity to comprehend the whole frame of things; And that is not diſorder in reſpect of the *whole*, which to us may appear ſo, being compared with ſome *particulars*. You know, that in the naturall body, the variety and diſſimilitude of parts, is required to the beauty of the whole; the roundneſſe of the head, the length of the arm, the flatneſſe of the hand, blackneſſe in one part, and whiteneſſe in another; all theſe being ſingly compared amongſt themſelves, though they may ſeem to argue ſome oppoſition and diffor-

mitie,

tie, yet look upon them as they ſtand in relation to the whole frame, and it will appear how in their ſeverall waies, they do each of them conduce to its comlineſſe and order. If this lower world had in it no changes and varieties, but were in all reſpects alike, it would not then be ſo properly κόσμος a beautiful world, as χάος, a lump or maſſe.

2. Another occaſion of mens offending in this kinde, is, when they will judge of events, according as they ſute with their own wiſhes. And in this caſe, tis impoſſible that every humor ſhould be ſatisfied; becauſe par-

ticular

ticular desires, (besides their opposition to one another) will likewise be inconsistent with the generall design. It would seem better perhaps to every private man, if he himself were a Magistrate, or a King, and every common Souldier a Commander, or a Generall. But how could this consist with the exigencies of a commonwealth, or an Army, where there must be degrees, and disproportion of places according to the necessitie of severall imployments. Tis so in the government of this great Universe: That difference which there is, betwixt particular

cular things, and times and persons, doth much conduce to the beauty and convenience of the whole.

Tis our safest way then to conclude that all matters are for the best, *beautiful in their times*, though to us they may seem full of disorder and contrariety. Thus the Apostle, in that remarkable place *Rom.* 11. 33. speaking concerning the rejection of the Jews, when God would cast off & destroy his peculiar people, and that for his own glory and advantage, He concludes, *His judgements are unsearchable, and his wayes past finding out. But of him,*

and

to him, are all things. As if he ſhould have ſaid, God wil do this ſtrange work, and though for my part, I know not the reaſon of it. *His judgements are unſearchable,* &c. yet ſure I am, that *of him,* and *to him* are all things; that is, as the making of all things, was *of his power,* ſo the reſolution of all things ſhall be *to his glory.*

Though *his judgements are as the great deep,* for their obſcurity and unmeaſurableneſſe, not to be fathomed by our ſhallow apprehenſions; yet *his righteouſneſſe is as the ſtrong mountains,* for their eminency and ſtablenes. *Pſal.* 36. 6. *Though clouds and*

and darkneſſe may be round about him, yet righteouſnes and judgement are the habitation of his throne. Pſal. 97. 2.

3. This may ſerve for *Exhortation*, to perſwade us unto theſe foure duties.

3 *Uſe.* For Exhortation.

1. Not to be too haſty in our deſire or proſecution of any thing.

2. Not to trouble our ſelves with any ſollicitous care about the ſucceſſe of things.

3. To be equally prepared for all future events.

4. To behave our ſelves with chearfulneſſe and contentment in all conditions.

1. Hence

1. Hence we learn not to be *too hasty* in our desire or prosecution of any thing. God best knows the fittest season for every event; we shall have it when its time is come, and before that, 'twould not be beautifull: *Like snow in Harvest* (as the Wiseman speaks) which though it might possibly be some *refreshment* to our particular, yet would be a *deformity* in the course of Nature.

Prov. 25. 13.

There are some men, whom the Prophet styles of a *hasty heart*, נמהרי לב *Isa.* 35. 4. who are too heady and impatient in their hopes. And it is a weakness that arises from

Transl. Fearfull.

from our infidelity and diſtruſt of Providence. *For he that beleeveth, maketh not haſte.* Cap. 28. 16. Tis Gods uſuall courſe to defer what he promiſes, thereby to exerciſe our faith, to put an edge on our deſires, and a value upon the bleſſing. In naturall affairs, we are fain to expect the proper ſeaſon, and *maturitie* of things; the husbandman will wait for his harveſt, he doth not expect to ſowe and reap both in a day. It ſhould be ſo likewiſe in other matters; And ſince that is alwaies the fitteſt time for every thing which God appoints, it will become us then

then patiently to wait his leiſure, and not with over-haſty deſires to run before him.

Abraham was fain to tarrie a long time for a Son, *David* for a Kingdome; and the whole world for *Chriſt*. He that rightly underſtands the worth of any bleſſing, & his own want, cannot think much to wait for it. The poore man, at the pool of *Bethesda*, being ſenſible of his own lameneſſe, was content to tarrie there 38. yeers in hopes of remedie. Suppoſe a promiſe were deferred to the utmoſt, yet do but compare the ſhortneſſe of our lives, with

with the duration of our soules, and then no delay can seem tedious. *Neq; enim est aliquid in tam brevibus vitæ metis ita serum quod longum expectare immortalis putet animus.* A man conscious to himself of his own immortalitie, cannot think any time long, which is confined within the narrow bounds of life. Boetius. Consol. lib 4.

Is there then any mercie which thou expectest? do not over rashly hasten it, with any indirect project, as if thou wert able to help the providence of God, with wiles and devises of thine owne. Though it be long in coming, yet it will come at

at last, it cannot be more slow then sure. When *Isaac* was layed upon the Altar, and bound for a sacrifice, and his Fathers hand lift up for the fatal blow, yet then there came a rescue from heaven, which would not have been so beautifull, if by any unlawfull act it had been hastned before that time, either by *Abrahams* sparing his Son, or *Isaacs* resisting his Father.

Joseph did undergo a tedious imprisonment in the Land of *Egypt*; tis likely, being the key-keeper, he might have taken his own time, and have scaped when he would.

But

But then he had loſt his preferment; whereas by tarrying Gods leiſure, he was delivered with advantage. Though *David* had been a long while anointed to a Kingdome, yet becauſe he did not uſe any haſty means for the injoying of it, therefore did Providence clear the paſſage for him, and proſpered it to him afterwards. He might have killed *Saul* in the Cave, and *Abner* too, when he found them ſleeping; but then he had been overhaſtie: 'twere better they ſhould fall by their Enemies. *The Lord ſhall ſmite them when their day ſhall come to dye.* 1 Sam. 26. 10.

1 Sam. 24. 11. 26. 7.

And before that, 'twould be but raſhnes to attempt it. And ſo likewiſe when he ſtopt himſelf in his haſte after *Nabals* life, you know within a while after, God took him away by his own immediate hand, and gave both his wife and eſtate to *David*.

An over-forwardneſſe in the haſtning of our hopes, is the ready way to imbitter them unto us. You know how much rouble and contention there grew, from that haſty act of *Sarah*, when in her diſtruſt of the promiſe, and fear of being childleſſe, ſhe muſt needs give *Hagar* to *Abraham*.

So

So likewiſe for *Jacobs* too much haſte in getting the bleſſing by a wrong means; you know it coſt him afterwards, many dangers, and a tedious exile. Whereas if he had tarried longer, God would have brought it about for him by a more eaſie and beautifull way.

Gods time is the beſt, and he never fails his own ſeaſon, *I the Lord will haſten it in its time.* Iſa. 60 22. For us to meaſure the fitneſſe of ſeaſons by our own weak apprehenſions, is not this to ſet the Sun by our Diall? We are too ſhort-ſighted, apt to Ante-date the promiſes. *The Lord*

Psal 27.13 *will arise and have mercy upon Sion, when the time to favour her; yea when the set time is come.* Psal. 102.13.

2. Hence we learn not to trouble our selves with any sollicitous care about the successe of things. To serve Providence is the usuall *means*, that is our work; But the *issue* and *event* of things that's Gods work, we, have nothing to do in it. That which is not under our *power*, should not be under our *care*. If there be nothing at our disposall, but that all events do depend upon an higher Providence, 'twere but a vain thing then to busie our selves, with hopes and

Ver. 9.

and fears about them. Much of the diſquietnes amongſt men in the world ariſes from hence, that they buſie themſelves about Gods work, and neglect their own.

Is there then an *evill* thou *feareſt*, why tis not in the power of any creature to hurt thee. Though men ſhould uſe plots, and threats againſt thee, yet they can do nothing. They ſate together, and counſelled againſt *David, deviſing to take away his life*, Pſal. 31. 13. But what was his comfort, why, ſaith he, *ver.* 15. *My times are in thy hands O Lord.* He knew that no ill ſucceſſe towards him,

was in the power of others.

Or is there an evil thou *feeleſt?* why it comes from the hand of God. Be not then impatient at the inſtrument. Tis but a childiſh, curriſh thing to beat the rod, or bite the ſtone that hurt thee. *David* could quietly undergo the railing of *Shimei*, when once he had diſcerned in it the Providence of God.

Or is there *a good thou hopeſt for?* why it is not within the reach of thy abilities. And therefore 'twere but in vain to think thou couldſt command it by thine own endeavours. We ſhould

count it a mad thing for one that is naturally lowe, to busie himself in the study and labour of growing tall, because this is not alterable by any thing in our power; *Since no man can adde one cubit to his stature.* Why tis so in other things likewise, God doth as well set bounds to our *estates*, as to our *statures*; and of our selves, we can as little adde one *penny* to that, as one *cubit* to this. And therefore, never let any one think that he can raise himself as he pleases, and be the master of his own fortunes. Though he were furnished with the grea-

Eccles. 9. 11.

teſt helps and probabilities of advancement. Yet *the battell is not alwayes to the ſtrong, nor the race to the ſwift; neither bread to the wiſe, nor yet riches to men of underſtanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happens to them all.* That is, there is a ſecret Providence, which doth ſo unavoidably diſpoſe of theſe lower events, that the likelieſt means we can uſe, cannot promiſe us any certain ſucceſſe.

They that with a compaſſe wiſdom will belay events, that with forecaſts, and proviſions will binde Providence, for the moſt part, are not onely diſap-

disappointed in what they hoped for, but do meet with a curse instead of it. See that place, *Isa.* 50. 11. *Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compasse your selves about with sparks, walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that you have kindled; This shall you have of my hands, you shall lye down in sorrow.*

3. Hence we learn to be equally prepared for all future events, not wishing for one more then another. What ever comes to passe shall be *beautifull*, and therefore should be *welcome*. All things that befall us shal lead us on to the same journeys end, Happines.

Diſert. Ii. 2. ca. 7.

And therefore we ſhould not in our expectation of future matters ingage our ſelves in the deſire of any particular ſucceſſe. But with a *travailers* indifferency (as *Epictetus* ſpeaks in *Arian.*) who when he comes to doubtfull turnings, doth not deſire one way ſhould be true more then another. So ſhould we entertain every thing that we meet with in our paſſage through this life. Eſpecially ſince we are ſure, that there is none of them, but if we belong to God, ſhall further us in that which is our main buſineſſe, our *journey* to happineſſe. And there-

therefore to be very sollicitous about any particular successe, what is it but to limit and confine the power of God? nay, to prefer our own policy before the wisedome of Providence, as if we alone were able to discern what would be the best issue of things. Mark how the same Heathen bespeaks such a person. Thou foolish man (saith he) doest thou not desire that which will be most convenient for thee? And can there be any thing better then what God appoints. τὴ, τὸ ὅσον ἐπι σοὶ διαφθειρεις τὸν κριτὴν, παράγεις τὸν σύμβουλον. Wherfore by such immoderate and eager

eager desires, thou doest (as much as in thee lies) to corrupt thy Judge, and seduce thy counsellor.

The *Stoicks* have many excellent passages to this purpose. *Nunquam sapientem pœnitentia subit,* (saith *Seneca*) *quia nihil melius illo tempore fieri potuit quam quod factum est.* A wise man is never troubled at any crosse event, He knows nothing could have been better then it is. *Omnia illi succedunt, nihil præter opinionem accidit.* All things are successefull to him, he is disappointed in nothing, because indifferent to every thing.

De Benef. lib. 4. 34.

While

Whileſt others are toſſed up and down betwixt hopes and fears, his mind is eſtabliſhed.

Now if meer *reaſon* could advance *Heathen* men to ſuch reſolutions, much more then ſhould a *Chriſtians faith* in the providence of God, with thoſe many promiſes wherein he hath an intereſt, raiſe his minde to this heroick temper, and make him bend himſelf with a ſubmiſſive compliance unto every condition.

Ob. But what then, may not a man (nay ſhould he not) be very earneſt in his deſires and prayers, for ſome particular

Ob.

cular deliverance or bleſſing?

Sol. I anſwer. Yes. But in all *temporall* matters, it muſt be ſtill with a tacit ſubmiſſion to the will of God, who knows better what is fit for us, then we our ſelves. See the example of *David* to this purpoſe. 2 *Sam.* 15. 25. He was there put to a verie great exigence, his Son *Abſolon*, had ſuddenly raiſed a great Army againſt him, in ſo much as he was fain to fly for his life. There were ſome of the Prieſts adhered to him, and followed him with the Ark. But he, upon ſerious thoughts deſires them to return again.

gain. For (ſaith he) *if I ſhall finde favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and ſhew me both it and his habitation; But if he thus ſay unto me, I have no delight in thee, Behold here I am, let him do to me, as ſeemeth good unto him.* Here's no deep anxietie or æſtuation of ſpirit. No bitter exclaiming againſt his unnaturall ſon, and diſloyall Subjects, but a quiet ſuccumbency, an indifferent compoſure of minde, which reſolves to be content in every condition. He puts the caſe both wayes, and is provided for either. If it prove after *this* manner, why then ſo. If *otherwiſe*, then

then thus. So true is that common Emblem, that every wiſe man is a *cube* or *dye*, not to be flung from his bottom. Let him be caſt any way, he ſtill lights upon his right *baſis*, whatever his *condition* may be, *Si fractus illabatur orbis*, yet his *minde* is ſtill calm and peaceable.

Ob. But would you have a man turn *Stoick?* ſhould he not be troubled at the afflictions that befall him?

Sol. I anſwer. Yes: He muſt be ſenſible of his ſufferings, and conſequently cannot but grieve under them; eſpecially ſo far as his own ſin and neglect hath occaſioned

casioned them. But then it should be his care to quiet his heart from immoderate trouble, by the consideration of that wise Providence, who doth dispose of all for the best.

4. Lastly, hence we learn, to behave our selves with *chearfulnesse* and *contentment* under all those conditions which the Providence of God shall think fittest for us. Tis the Wisemans own inference from the text, in the verses immediately after it. *There is nothing better then for a man to rejoyce, and do good in his life; that he should eat and drink, and injoy the good of his labour.* V. 12, 13.

Æquum est ut homini pareat, quicquid placet Deo.

hour. For if every thing be best which God appoints, we have no reason then to be troubled at any event. What though it do crosse our desires, yet 'twould not have been so well, if it had been otherwise. Things cannot be better with us then they are. *David* thought it a hard case, that his childe by *Bathsheba* must dye. But did he loose any thing by it? was it not better for him to have such a legitimate Heir as *Solomon* was? We are but ill contrivers of our own welfare, and therefore should without murmuring submit our selves and

and affairs to the government of Providence. What though that do ſtraiten us in our deſires? you are content to let the *Phyſitian* bar you of many things, becauſe he hath caſt your water, felt your pulſe. Conſider then, doth it not as much concern us to provide for the ſalvation of our ſouls, as the health of our bodies? or doth not God underſtand this, as well as the Phyſitian that? What reaſon have we then to repine at his proceedings? He was a wiſe Son in *Plutarch*, who being told by a friend that his Father would diſ-inherit him; Anſwered,

Non

Non faciet niſi faciendum: He will do nothing but what he ſhould. Thus ſhould a Chriſtian willingly reſigne up himſelf in every condition to the diſpoſall of Providence.

Do but apply this conſideration according to the ſeverall occaſions of your lives. When your hearts are at any time amazed or dejected with the thought of the *publick* confuſions; Remember, that God ſits in heaven, obſerving and ordering all theſe inferior motions for the beſt.

And ſo too in the caſe of *particular* ſufferings, tis likely that there is not any amongſt you, but hath

hath ſome kinde of *private* trouble & grievance to which he is more eſpecially expoſed. Either weaknes of body, or too narrow a fortune, loſſes in your eſtates, diſappointment in yourhopes, unhappie relations, or the like. And theſe things as we are *men*, cannot chuſe but grate upon our ſpirits, with ſome kinde of harſhneſſe and diſcontent. But now, as *Beleevers*, we have a remedie againſt them. For conſider, there is nothing befals us by chance. All things are ordered by the deliberate counſell and fore-knowledge of God. He is as exactly care-

carefull of every one of us, as if he had nothing elſe to look after. Do not think that any trouble befals you (becauſe he doth not regard, for his care & providence doth extend to all things; nor becauſe he *cannot* help, for he is Almighty; nor becauſe he *will not*, for he is equally infinite in all his Attributes; But becauſe his *wiſedome* finds that condition to be fitteſt for thee; there is ſome thing amiſſe which ſhold be mended. When the ſuperfluous humour is corrected, the phyſicall potion ſhal be taken away. And tis not reaſonable to expect phyſick and health

health both together. When the wound is healed, the ſmarting plaiſter ſhall be removed. And thou mayeſt confidently ſay with *David*, *Pſal.* 119. 75. *I know O Lord that thy judgements are right, and that thou in faithfulnes haſt afflicted me.*

How happy might we be, if we could ſettle our hearts upon theſe conſiderations?

FINIS.